







THE CRADLE  
*of*  
CIVILISATION

*By*  
“ SAYVRA ”

KITABISTAN  
ALLAHABAD

FIRST PUBLISHED 1943

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## INTRODUCTION

The contemplation of the facts in to-day's world in this fourth decade of the twentieth century is an extremely unpleasant job. To call attention to them is not a sure path to popularity. The writer of this book remembers the suppressed laughter which met a speaker at one of the war meetings in the autumn of 1940, when he suggested that the next theatre of operations was likely to be the Middle East and that, therefore, his audience should acquire some knowledge of this part of the world.

The Middle East has affected the very foundations of Western life more deeply than any of the continents of the world has done, yet how little do we know about it! The Middle East is a world in itself just as Europe or America are worlds in themselves. It is not a haphazard collection of States, but an historical, climatic and geographical unity. It is not often realised, for instance, that a citizen of Paris is more different in his outlook upon life from the citizen of Berlin about 400 miles

away, than is the felaheen of Egypt from the wandering Bedouin in Saudi Arabia much farther away.

There is some confusion as to the exact connotation of the term Middle East. Some writers include Turkey under this appellation, while others have omitted this country. For the purpose of this book, however, the Middle East comprises the countries of Egypt, Transjordan, Palestine, Iraq, Syria (including Lebanon), Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Iran. Perhaps it would be more correct to call this area the Middle and Near East. This territory has been the cradle of civilisation and centre of the world for thousands of years. Great events have taken place here: the empire of Rameses, Cyrus and Alexander, the ascendancy of Assyria, and Babylon, the lives of Jesus and Mohammed, the siege of Troy and Jerusalem, the fall of Babylon, the rise of the sea power of Tyre—all these have made the Middle East the historical and spiritual cradle of world history. The two most important movements of the Middle Ages—Islam and the Crusades—started in the Middle East. From ancient times wave after wave of wandering tribesmen have overrun this bridge between Europe and East Asia. Here fought Alexander the Great and Sulai-

man the Magnificent; Julius Caesar, Pompey and Mark Antony; Gengiz Khan and Tamerlane; Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, Saladin, Richard Coeur-de-Lion and Napoleon Bonaparte. It was in Turkey and her dependencies stretching south to the Red Sea and east to the Persian Gulf that conflicts between England, France, Germany and Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries became most acute. It is here that the air-lines of western, central, and eastern Europe meet on their way to India, Australia and the Far East. And it is here that to-day the Allied forces are inflicting heavy losses on the enemy in Egypt, while in another sector, the Nazi armies batter against Russian defences in a desperate attempt to reach the rich oil fields of the Caucasus. The Middle East, therefore, is important both historically and strategically. There was a time when to the average European, the Middle East conjured up the Orient, the Dardanelles, the Lake of Galilee, with images of sun-steeped repose, a land where there was little movement. It was a melancholy repose because of the memories of past destinies of humanity, which throughout these regions slumbered, preserved under the mantle of Islam. The last alone remains, the other images are getting blurred

because of the swift movement of armies and events that will shape the destinies of the individual states for years to come.

Generally speaking, the Middle East is a sun-baked world of deserts swept by blinding sandstorms, of bleak mountains and bare hills, of dry, treeless steppes. Except in the northern highlands, the blazing heat makes everything burning to the touch. But in oases and along the banks of rivers and most of the sea coast, the land is green and fertile.

The inhabitants of this parched, grimly hostile land are mostly poor, and illiterate. There are scattered groups of Christians, Jews, devil-worshippers and other sects, but the overwhelming majority in all countries including Palestine are Moslems, who speak varying dialects of Arabic, Turkish and Persian.

Let us review these independent states, which are now creating a new order in the East.

## I

# EGYPT

Population—about 1,60,00,000.

Capital—Cairo. Population—13,00,000.

The country with its varied history 5,000 years old has been the meeting place of most lines of Levantine development. Semite, Greeks Romans, Arabs, Turks, Jews, Italians, French and English have all played their part in the formation of Egypt.

At the dawn of history, Egypt was one of the most highly civilised countries that the world has ever seen. After 3,000 years of independence, Egypt fell under the conquering hand of Cambyses of Persia, then to Alexander and finally to Augustus Caesar. Later, Islam swept the country and Egypt was the centre of the Fatimite Caliphs. In 1517 Egypt was incorporated in the Ottoman Empire and was governed by Pashas sent from Constantinople. Egypt has always been—particularly since Napoleon's Egyptian Expedition—a battlefield of Western interests. This has been mainly due to the

desire of European powers for economic expansion towards the Far East and for a strategic stronghold to secure their trade routes. In 1798 Napoleon came to Egypt and defeated the Mamelukes, the then rulers of the country. Napoleon's ultimate design was to make Egypt the base for an invasion of India, but the battle of Nile was lost to Nelson and Napoleon had to flee the country. In 1803 the English armies left Egypt and Mohammed Ali, an Albanian Officer in the Turkish army made himself the ruler and founded the present dynasty. Between 1870 and 1880 the Khedive's government was weakened to such an extent by military disasters, extravagance and misgovernment that the Sultan of Turkey deposed the Khedive Ismail and named his son Tewfik Khedive in his place. A cabal of discontented army officers organised a successful revolt against Tewfik, who appealed to England for help. Failing to obtain the co-operation of the French, Italian and Turkish forces, British troops alone restored order. Under the guidance of Sir Evelyn Baring (later Lord Cromer), the Consul General in Egypt, the Khedive spared the lives of the leading rebels, and a scheme of liberal reconstruction was instituted under the

protection of the British Army. Modern methods of government were introduced; order was brought into finance and a modern irrigation system constructed. When the last Great War broke out, to avoid the legal difficulties inherent in Turkey's nominal suzerainty over Egypt, a British Protectorate was declared, which was to terminate at the end of the war. But British occupation continued even after the armistice owing to disorders organised against the government, which made constitutional and administrative changes impossible. The British Protectorate terminated in February 1922, and Sultan Ahmed Fuad was proclaimed King of Egypt. Britain retained some concessions in the matter of the defence of Egypt and the Suez Canal against foreign aggression, because a glance at the map makes it clear that Egypt occupies a very important strategic position in the communications of Britain to India and Australia. It guards the Suez and dominates the Eastern Mediterranean. Further, the power that holds Egypt can control the Red Sea and this makes it easy for armies to invade Arabia and India. The concessions made by England did not satisfy advanced nationalist opinion in Egypt, which desired especially the transfer of



the Sudan to Egypt and agitation continued against the King, who was finally driven to dissolve parliament and govern by decree. Egypt became a fully sovereign state by the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty signed in London in 1936; the military occupation by British troops was terminated and Ambassadors were duly accredited in London and Cairo. Provision was made in the treaty for a reconsideration of its terms in 1956. With the treaty question out of the way, democratic government has now been restored, and Egypt has been on good and friendly terms with Britain since 1936. Though she is a non-belligerent in this war, her sympathies are undoubtedly with the Allied Nations; she has broken off diplomatic relations with Germany and Italy.

King Farouk of Egypt is only 22 years old; it is less than six years since his country gained independence. That explains why many Egyptian problems still remain unsolved. Egypt is still in the throes of transition; the entire fabric of Egyptian life is full of contradictions. While the younger generation talks of Science and nationalism, the older folk cling passionately to their centuries-old customs, and faith. One predominant reason is that in essence, Egyptian character has hardly been

affected by Western Civilisation. Thus the inner conflict in every individual Egyptian becomes more baffling every day.

There are two main factors in the life and the people of Egypt: the sun and the Nile. The Nile makes life possible in the narrow fertile strip of land called Egypt and the sun pulls up the crops as if by a magnet. From the dawn of civilisation, agriculture in Egypt has depended upon the annual flooding of the Nile and on the covering of fresh silt which the river brings down from the Abyssinian highlands and spreads over the valley. In about a century, the level of the land is raised by about four inches. The level of the Nile Valley to-day, therefore, is seven feet higher than in Cleopatra's days and about thirty feet higher than when the Pyramids were built. But to-day agriculture in Egypt does not depend solely on the annual flooding of the Nile. A system of controlled irrigation has been introduced, by means of large storage tanks by which the land can be irrigated throughout the year. Instead of the single annual crop of previous years, Egypt can now grow two or even three crops a year.

Egypt's political life suffers from a great handi-

cap; she has no middle class. Vast territories of Egypt belong mainly to a few thousand people out of a population of over 15 millions. Alongside ostentatious riches is grinding poverty; there are millions of fellaheen who have never in their lives eaten a square meal or worn a garment that was not full of tatters.

Though Cairo is the capital of Egypt, Alexandria is the more important strategically. Its name serves to remind the student of its historical origin and even to-day it is one of the largest Greek cities in the world. Alexandria is not an Arab town, but European in its make-up.

Cairo is known the world over for its famous El Azhar University, the principal religious University of Muslims. It specialises in the teaching of Muslim Theology and the Shariat or Canonic law and has been for centuries a centre of Arab culture. Will it continue to teach ancient scriptures exclusively, when modern youth especially in the awakening East, is lured by gods of 'nationality' and 'progress,' or will this ancient seat of learning modify its courses to suit changing times? History alone can furnish an answer to this question.

## PALESTINE

Population—15,00,000.

Capital—Jerusalem. Population—1,35,000.

Palestine, a country of which everyone has heard and few know anything about, lies on the frontier between Egypt and the Middle East. On the West the Mediterranean bounds it and on the East about 60 miles away the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea, the salt sea, deep down 1292 feet below sea level. On the North lies Syria and on the South the Desert. It is a country of rugged hills and precipitous valleys. Water is scarce; agriculture, except in coastal plains is difficult, and mineral and industrial resources are negligible.

Palestine, like all other countries of the Middle East, has a long history. During the whole course of 5,000 years it has seldom been independent, and never united and independent at the same time. The discoveries of archaeologists prove that civilisation in Palestine was very old. Palestine had a

part in the development of civilisation in the Eastern Mediterranean of which ancient Egypt was the centre. Archaeology and Egyptian inscriptions prove it to have been a land of small chiefships, under the influence and occasionally the rule of Egypt, menaced by powers on the North and desert raiders from the East.

The Jews did not come into Palestine in the early period. They were certainly not there in 1400 B. C. as is shown by the Egyptian diplomatic correspondence from Palestine discovered at Tel Amarna. Palestine was then still a no man's land under petty chiefs on the frontier between Egypt and the Hittite Empire. Jewish history in Palestine begins about 1,000 B. C., and it is at least probable that the Jews came as invaders from the East in two waves, which established separate centres of rule at Samaria and Jerusalem. The story contained in the Old Testament is certainly largely mythical, and there is some difficulty in accepting the story of David and Solomon as historically true. The separate Jewish Kingdom of Samaria was utterly destroyed by the Assyrians about 700 B. C. and all trace of it was lost. Judah and Jerusalem played a less adventurous part in these turbulent times, and survived

for a century as vassals of Assyria. After the fall of Assyria and Babylon, the King of Jerusalem, Josuah tried to fish in troubled waters between Egypt and Babylon, and lost his kingdom for his pains, and leading Jews were deported to Babylon. Thence they returned to Jerusalem with the advent of Cyrus in 550 B. C. From this time Palestine became part of the Persian Empire, and on the destruction of that Empire by Alexander, became part of Egypt's territory under the Ptolemies.

Up till this time Palestine had been important as a battlefield between great Empires of the North and South, Egypt, the Hittites, Assyria and Babylon. But during the period of Persian rule, the Jewish religion was developed into its present shape, and it is vital to understand what happened if we are to understand the problem of Palestine to-day. The upper class Jews returning from Babylon brought back with them traditions of their history and religion that had been developed in exile. Oppressed as they were, they had naturally developed a religion which compensated for their situation, and taught them that though oppressed by men they were chosen people of God, and they moulded both the story of their past and their

aspirations for the future to fit this myth.

Themselves a subject people to the Persian and Egyptian Empires, the Jewish families were locally permitted to rule over the non-Jew inhabitants of Palestine and the period 200-100 B. C. when Rome was expanding to world Empire, the high priests of Jerusalem took advantage of the quarrels between Ptolemy of Egypt and Antiochus of Syria and built up a little kingdom in Palestine. Their rule was shortlived and collapsed before the Roman arms, and in 37 B. C. King Herod, son of Antipater a Jewish friend of Julius Caesar, became Prince of Judaea under Rome. He died in 4 B. C., and his kingdom was divided between his sons, Archelaus who obtained Jerusalem was dethroned for misgovernment by Augustus in A. D. 6, and Jerusalem passed under the rule of Roman officials of whom the 5th was Pontius Pilate.

Amidst the welter of prophecies and myths which the Jews brought back from Babylon was a tradition that a Jewish king should come who would make the Jews rulers of all the world. In their unhappy conditions under corrupt Roman official rule, the Jews were ready to welcome Jesus as the fulfiller of their traditions. Jesus fought for three

years in Galilee, the northern part of Palestine and finally came to face the orthodox and narrow-minded Jews of Jerusalem, the centre of the priesthood. There he was given tumultuous welcome as the coming king, but when he explained that the kingdom which he brought was a spiritual and not a worldly one, the Jews, disappointed of their ambitions, compelled the Roman Procurator to have him executed for sedition.

Some thirty years later, Jewish ambition flamed up into open rebellion against Rome. A powerful force under Titus and Vespasian put down the rebellion and captured Jerusalem after an obstinate siege, and in the assault the Jewish temple in the Citadel was accidentally burned.

After this the Jews were dispersed and the centre of their religion moved elsewhere, though the main population of Palestine was unaffected. A fresh attempt by the Jews in Hadrian's time to establish a kingdom at Jerusalem failed, and since that time the Jews have had no political power in Palestine nor a country of their own. The Jewish spirit, therefore, lacks a physical body which is provided by the possession of a country of one's own. It has been torn from its organic roots, has no soil,



no national basis and wanders about disembodied.

This fear of bodilessness expresses itself to-day in the Arabs among whom the Jews have gone to stay, in a feeling of intense antagonism. We can understand why the Jew desires so passionately a homeland of his own. Ben Gurion, stalwart pioneer of Zionism—its leader, of course, is Dr. Weizmann—expresses this desire when he says: "It is an urge deeper than nationalism, economics, religion—though it contains elements of all these. Ultimately it is our faith in an ideal and our daily effort to manifest it that creates the new life of Palestine." It is because of the strength of this faith and the tenacity with which the Jew has clung to it, that has made him sometimes admired but more often disliked. He cannot be blamed; he has carried a heavy burden through the centuries and the nerve-racking uncertainty of his future has left indelible marks on his character.

To return to the historical narrative, when the Roman Empire became Christian under Constantine Christian priests under the patronage of the Emperors and Empresses and their nobles, built many magnificent churches and monasteries on the sites reported to be associated with

incidents in the life of Jesus. But with the decay of the Empire and the corruption of Christianity, the Christian life in Palestine fell into a sad state.

Then Islam came like a cleansing fire from the desert and the corrupt and debased Christianity of the Byzantine provinces of the Middle East collapsed before it. The Caliph Omar captured Jerusalem after a siege of 70 days. He spared the lives but restricted the religion of the Christians. He found the rock of the temple of the Jews covered with filth left there by the Christians to insult the Jews, and with his own hands and helped by his high officers, he cleared the site, and there established a place of prayer for Muslims. To-day, the mosque of Omar, the Dome of the Rock still stands, one of the beautiful and most venerated shrines of Islam.

Palestine under the Caliphs suffered with the rest of the East from the wars that resulted from the dissensions in Islam. In 1099 A. D., Christian enthusiasts from the West, inspired by the revival of Christianity led by St. Bernard, set out to recapture Palestine and the Christian holy places from Islam, and succeeded in capturing Jerusalem. A dissolute and disreputable Christian kingdom held Jerusalem

for 90 years, until the Kurdish conqueror, Saladin recaptured Jerusalem in 1187. In spite of various attempts by the Christians to recover the holy city, it remained in Muslim hands, except for 10 years from 1229 when the great emperor of Italy and Germany, Frederick II, held the city by treaty with the Caliph. The Christians continued to hold fortified ports on the coasts. Then followed fresh devastation by Mongolian invaders from Central Asia. After their departure the forces of the Sultan of Egypt attacked the Christian fortresses, and the last, Acre, fell in 1291. Under Egyptian rule the Christian priests crept back and rebuilt the churches to be devastated again by Timur in 1400. Finally, in 1516 Sultan Salim the Grim of Turkey, took the country from the Egyptians and Palestine passed under Turkish rule.

The Turks took little interest in the country except in the revenue which could be screwed out of it, and it lay in poverty and ruins under the misgovernment of semi-independent sheikhs. The only event of interest in this period was Napoleon's invasion and repulse with British help at the siege of Acre. This was Napoleon's first decisive defeat and it put a final seal of doom on his designs against

Turkey and India.

During the last war, Palestine was the scene of important fighting between the Turks and Germans on the one side and Allenby's British Army on the other. The Turks were finally defeated and the British military authorities occupied Palestine. It has since been a British mandatory state.

The trouble in Palestine seems to be as someone has humorously put it, that the country is too holy to too many people. For the Christians, it is the birthplace of Christianity; to Jews, who held it for centuries, it is the holy of holies; Moslems have held it almost uninterruptedly for 12 centuries. Jerusalem is the third holy city of Islam. "To walk through Jerusalem is to walk through history. Beneath one's feet and scattered around in every direction lie the bones of the past." It is because of the past, that there has been so much trouble and bloodshed in Palestine. Needing Jewish and Arab support in the last war, Britain made promises to both rather freely. The ardent Jewish Zionists believed they were going to get Palestine as a Jewish State, basing their claims upon the declaration of the British Government made in 1917 now known as the famous Balfour Declaration. It reads

as follows: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment of a National Home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country." But there are two facts in this Palestine deadlock, which must be taken into consideration in any study of the subject. The first is that the Balfour Declaration did not promise to instal the Jews in a vacuum. The Jewish immigrants were to be settled in an Arab country, and what only aggravated the seriousness of the problem was that these Jews were to be installed in a part of the world which has been a focus of struggle between rival imperialist powers. In 1917 anti-Semitism had not assumed the terrifying proportions which it since did in Hitler's Europe. Now the problem of a homeland for the sons of Israel has ceased to be a Jewish problem; it has become so vast that it has now become a non-Jewish problem.

The immigration of the Jews into Palestine

was bitterly resented by the Arabs who were smarting under a deep-rooted resentment at what they considered a betrayal by the British. All their pent-up anger found expression in a series of Anti-Jewish riots, revolts, and murders. The chief stirrer of Arab discontent was the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. His real name is Haj Amin Effendi. It is not true as is sometimes believed, that he has a very large Arab following. He represented the most vocal and the most violent Anti-Jewish Arabs. In 1936 a riot at Jaffa led to a general Arab strike and which in turn developed into a violent movement accompanied by murder, arson, intimidation and attacks on the local and imperial forces. Fresh British troops had to be sent to Palestine to quell the outbreaks. Even before the "strike" started, the British Government appointed a Royal Commission under the presidentship of Lord Peel to enquire into the underlying causes of unrest, how the mandate was being implemented, and what grievances existed. The Commission recommended separation of the country into a sovereign Arab State, a sovereign Jewish State and a British mandated territory to include the holy places. At first the Jews protested against this partition, but

gradually their leaders seem to have reconciled themselves to this solution as being the best under the circumstances. Arab agitation on the other hand was greatly intensified and terrorism on a wide scale was started. An attempt was made to arrest the Grand Mufti in 1937, but he fled the country. He first went to Syria, then to Baghdad and Iran, stirring up anti-British feelings everywhere. He is now in Berlin, trying his very best to create difficulties for the Allied Powers, by fomenting revolts and disorders among the Arabs. Although the Grand Mufti had left Palestine, the more extreme section of the Arabs continued to give trouble. By the middle of 1938, these Arabs all but succeeded in paralysing the government. In November 1938 the Partition Scheme was withdrawn and the British Government made one more attempt to solve this very difficult problem. In 1939 a Round Table Conference was held in London to come to some agreement regarding the future policy for Palestine. The Conference failed to achieve its main purpose; there was disagreement not only between Jews and Arabs, but at one stage, the Mufti-Arabs (followers of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem) refused even to sit alongside those

who did not see eye to eye with the extremists of their country. Subsequently the British issued a White Paper which laid down a future policy for Palestine. Its main provisions are the creation of Palestine into an independent state after a transition period with the Jews in permanent minority. The number of Jewish immigrants has been fixed at 15,000 per year till the Jews form one third of the population of Palestine. These proposals have been rejected by both the Arabs and the Jews. To-day the number of Jews in Palestine exceeds the quota contemplated in the above scheme.

The situation to-day briefly is this: the bulk of the population is Muslim. In 1940 Muslims numbered 9,41,000 out of 15,00,000. These Muslims represent the indigenous population, and have more historic right to be in Palestine than anyone else. They are mostly poor cultivators and are not nomadic people like the Arabs of Arabia. They are poor, educationally backward and fanatical. Politically a few are pan-Islamic in sentiment, and the rest are anxious to see Palestine an independent Arab State.

The Jews in 1922 numbered 83,000. Immi-



gration to-day has increased their number to 4,60,000 in 1940. They are intelligent and industrious. Tel-Aviv, the Jewish city in Palestine is a living monument of their industry. Out of the sands of the desert, they have built a great modern city of 1,50,000 souls, 99 per cent of whom are Jews. But the general complaint is that Palestine Jews are aggressive chauvinists, whose aim is to make Palestine predominantly a Jewish State. To achieve this end they have used two methods, firstly, by political pressure on the British Parliament, both in England and through America they have tried to force the mandatory authorities to support their claims, and secondly in Palestine they are using all their wealth and powers of intellect and organisation to oust the Arab from the country. Both as farmers and factory workers the Jews are out to supplant the Arabs.

The Arab, politically without influence and intellectually unable to compete with the Jews, has had recourse to direct action against them and tried to check the Jewish immigration by boycott, murder and rioting, thus forcing the mandatory power to take measures to restore order that have in fact helped the Jews against the Arabs.

Christians in Palestine in 1940 numbered 1,20,000. They have at present no particular grievances and have taken little part in the Arab-Jew controversy, though sympathy tends to be rather towards the Arabs. It should not, however, be forgotten that the mandatory power is Christian, and so at present the Christians have no practical grievance. If this state of affairs were to be altered, unless great care was taken not to offend Christian susceptibilities in any way, it is unlikely that Christians inside and outside Palestine would remain quiescent.

What of the future? It would be tedious to go into the details of the reports, commissions and conferences that have unsuccessfully attempted to solve this thorny problem. But the facts seem to be as follows. The Jewish hopes for a Jewish State in Palestine are doomed to failure for religious and economic reasons. The exclusive Jewish claims will never be accepted by Islam and Christianity, and the Jews are not powerful enough to press them against their opposition. The country of Palestine is wretchedly poor in resources. The Jews cannot maintain their standards of life there, except as a small ruling minority, without large and

regular outside help, so permanent settlement in Palestine is not popular with individual Jews, and is no solution to the Jewish national problem in other countries. As regards the Arab claims, it is the backwardness of the Arabs generally that stands in the way of their fulfilment. Palestine, independent under Arab control would promise no security either against internal disturbance or against outside aggression. Union with Turkey, Syria, Iraq or Egypt would merely restore it to its historic role of a frontier battle-ground between rival Middle Eastern interests.

All this, however, does not make the problem of the Arabs and Jews easier. Both Arab and Jewish viewpoints can be defended and attacked with equally convincing arguments. But it cannot be solved in terms of politics and quotas and Royal commissions; it has outgrown such solutions. It is above everything else a human problem.

## TRANSJORDAN

Population—about 3,00,000.

Capital—Aman. Population—12,000.

Transjordan is a British Mandated territory, which means it is an area in which responsibility for government is vested in the British Government on the authority of a mandate from the League of Nations.

Transjordan is bounded on the West by Palestine, in the North by Syria, on the East by Iraq and on the South by Saudi Arabia.

The British recognised Abdullah Shaik as the Amir of Transjordan in 1921. In 1922, the country was made an independent principality within the framework of the Mandatory regime; in 1928 it was endowed with its own constitution and parliament. Amir Abdullah is the surviving head of the Hashimite branch of the descendants of Mohammed and, therefore, ranks high throughout the Arab world.

The country has some agricultural and eco-

conomic possibilities, but it is still waiting for an intensive development. The complexities of Near-Eastern politics have limited the progress of this country. The following words of their Prime Minister sum up the situation admirably: "We are only a small country; we can't do much. Besides, these days everything in the near East disintegrates immediately into politics."

## 4

### IRAQ

Population—35,60,000.

Capital—Baghdad. Population—2,49,000.

Iraq is the Mesopotamia of the last war. It extends from Kurdistan on the North and North-East to the Persian Gulf on the South and South-East, and from Iran on the East to Syria and the Arabian desert on the West. It is the "Land of the two rivers," the Euphrates and the Tigris. This land shares with Egypt the distinction of being the cradle of western civilisation. Here was situated, the Garden of Eden and from this region Noah sailed out in his ark. Here, 5,000 years ago, the Sumerians lived in great cities under the rule of priests; then came the Chaldeans with their famous city and temple at Ur. From here Father Abraham set out into Palestine. Empire after Empire has arisen in this rich valley, Assyrians, Hittites, Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Parthians and Romans have succeeded one another in the rule of

Mesopotamia. Here the land has witnessed the rise of Nineveh and the prophecies of Jonah, the madness of Nebuchadnezzar, the love story of Queen Vashti and Queen Esther and King Ahasuerus and the fall of Haman. Here Darius ruled, and Alexander, Trajan the Emperor of Rome, and Naushirvan the Just and the great Caliph Haroun-al-Rashid. Truly the Tigris and the Euphrates have seen a pageant of history second only to that enacted on the banks of the Nile.

In those days the central plain of Mesopotamia was watered by an elaborate system of irrigation canals. But in the dark ages after the fall of the Caliphs, as one conquering horde after another ravaged the country, the canals fell into disuse. Tribes of nomads from the steppes of northern Asia drove the peasants off the land and the waters of Tigris and the Euphrates, uncontrolled, spread out in wide fever-bearing marshes. Thus in time, one of the world's most fertile regions, the legendary site of the Garden of Eden, has become a virtual desert.

The Iraqis still suffer from this decline. In a land which was the birthplace of letters, more than 90 per cent of the people are illiterate. Politically,

the country has more than its usual quota of misfortunes. For three centuries before the first world War Iraq shared in the living death of the Ottoman Empire. The war released it from its torpor and under the Treaty of Lausanne, ratified in August 1923, Turkey renounced the sovereignty over Mesopotamia and it became a British mandatory State. Iraq is the first example of a mandatory State brought into being by the last war and which has been prepared by the Mandatory Power for its future independence, and finally accepted on terms of complete equality by the other nations. Iraq became a Member of the League of Nations in 1932.

Great Britain has no need to feel ashamed of her work in Iraq. Much has been said and written, with some justification—about the harmful influence of a Western power on the countries of the East. In every instance this has been due not to the politics of individuals but to the spirit underlying the policy of the ruling power. Similarly its good influence was rooted in the same spirit. Thus the humanising influence of British rule, with its introduction of the ideas of freedom and fair-play, was rarely due to



the work of any particular Governor. It was the natural outcome of what is known as British Civilisation. This is well illustrated in the case of Iraq.

The history of modern Iraq is in many ways similar to that of modern Syria. When in 1919 the country came under British administration, the British mandate was not accepted unanimously by the Iraqis. In March 1920 when nearby Syria declared independence and placed Feizal on the throne at Damascus, a series of insurrections against the British broke out in the South-East of Iraq. In November of the same year, the country was given a National Government under the guidance of a British High Commissioner.

In 1921 King Feizal of Damascus was driven out of Syria by the French. His elder brother, Abdullah became Amir of Transjordan and Feizal came to Iraq and offered himself to the inhabitants as a candidate for the throne. He was received with acclamation and accepted as King by the ministers. The British High Commissioner held a referendum in which 96 per cent of the votes cast were in favour of Feizal, and the majority desired continuation of the Mandate.

There were a number of disputes on constitu-

tional questions between King Feizal and the British Government about the terms of the Mandate, and temporary settlements were reached, which culminated in 1930 with the grant of complete independence.

The population of Iraq is divided fairly equally into Shias and Sunnis, the two Mohammedan religious sects. Since the Shias centre in Persia, the tendency of their fellow-Shias in Iraq has always been towards Persia and Persian culture. The Sunnis, on the other hand, were under the influence of Turkey, which ruled over what is modern Iraq. Thus Government jobs, money and influence have been in Sunni hands. That is not all, for the country is riven by minorities. Besides the Mohammedans, other religious and racial groups in the country include the Chaldean Catholics, the Chaldean Christians, Kurds, Turks, and Assyrians. These differences still play a sufficiently prominent part to transform even minor difficulties into political problems.

King Feizal II, the present ruler of Iraq, is only seven years old, and is under the regency of his uncle. On the outbreak of the present war, the German secret agents in the Middle East tried to

get a control over Iraq, because of its strategic position in relation both to India and Egypt. The collapse of France in 1940 placed Syria in the hands of the Vichy French, men like General Dentz who were pro-Axis. This increased the threat to the internal security of neighbouring Iraq, and the German agents approached dissatisfied Iraqi politicians who either from motives of treachery to their boy king or from fear that Germany was on the brink of complete victory, prepared to hand over their country to German tyranny. Soon steps had to be taken against the Iraqi Prime Minister, Rashid Ali Gilani, who was the leader of this movement. There is no doubt whatever that German agents inspired Rashid Ali to fight the British in Iraq. Prominent among these was Baron Von Oppenheim. Quick action was taken by the Indian Army and Rashid Ali, after some fight, had to fly from the country. Some equipment and war material did reach Rashid Ali from his German friends through Syria, but the movement was either premature or it failed because of the British delaying action in Greece and Crete. It is worth remembering that Mesopotamia was the goal of the Kaiser's dream of Eastern domination. He could then

strike at Egypt and India. A Middle Eastern sector of the Berlin Baghdad Railway, which now extends to Basra, was built by the Germans to further this plan.

With more irrigation, more roads and better agricultural methods Iraq would be able to support a population many times its present size. It produces commodities as varied as wheat, barley and bananas, lentils, cotton and tobacco. The best wool for carpets comes from Iraq and four-fifths of the world's dates. But modern Iraq lives on oil mostly. The most important oil town is Kirkuk; the oil fields round it are supposed to be among the richest in the world. The oil is pumped from the Mosul oil fields to the Mediterranean, one outlet of which is at Haifa and the other terminal at Tripolis. The total length of these pipelines is 1,150 miles. It was for her strategic position, therefore, as well as for her economic potential that Iraq offered a rich prize to the Axis invaders who had already struck at Egypt.

## SYRIA

Population—16,82,500.

Capital—Damascus. Population—2,30,000.

The Republics of Syria and the Lebanon (still often described by the geographical term 'Syria') are French mandatory states in the Levant. Syria is bounded on the north by Turkey, on the east by Iraq, on the south by Transjordan and Palestine and on the west by Lebanon.

Syria and Lebanon were taken from the Turks in the last war and in 1920, the Conference of San Remo allotted France a mandate over the whole of Syria. Feizal was then king of Syria, but he was defeated by the French army in the battle of Khan Meisalun, and had to leave the country. He was later made ruler of Iraq by the British.

Syria, probably, is the most politically minded of the Near Eastern countries. The Syrians are bound to play a leading part in the future of the Near East. But the French took no heed of the

strong national consciousness of the Syrians and of their high cultural standards. While the citizens of Lebanon submitted to the French mandate without violent opposition, the Syrians never ceased to regard it as unjustified. There were continuous struggles on the part of the Syrians and these were suppressed by the French authorities. For many years French rule wavered. There were promises, constitutional experiments, bloody risings of the people and even more bloody reprisals and bombardments. The most serious outbreak occurred in 1925; it began under Sultan Pasha Al Atrash and soon spread. In quelling it, the French military forces bombarded Damascus, and many places of historic importance were damaged, among them being the Azm Palace and the "Street called Straight." Order was restored in 1927. In 1930 a republican constitution was promulgated for Syria providing for a President, a Cabinet and a Parliament. The Syrians, however, were not satisfied; their grievance was that the constitution did not remove the French army and the all-powerful French High Commissioner at Beirut who controlled Syrian affairs. After considerable unrest and widespread disturbances in the country, separate treaties bet-

ween France and the Governments of Syria and Lebanon were signed in 1936. Both countries were promised independence within three years. The Syrians have resented French rule; their feelings can be gauged from the following statement of one of their leading politicians: "I love France and I respect the French in their own land. But I hate them in my own land which suffers from their mis-rule." While this state of tension existed between the rulers and the ruled, came the second Great War and the unexpected collapse of France in 1940. Situated on the direct route of a German drive towards the oil fields of the Middle East, Syria is potentially an important battlefield. By the end of April 1941, Syria was infested with a very large number of German agents and dupes in league with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. This infiltration of Germans into Syria and their intrigues in Iraq constituted very grave dangers to the whole Western flank of the British defences in the Nile Valley. The attitude of the Vichy government underwent a perceptible change and air bases in Syria and Lebanon were placed at the disposal of Germany. War materials were also sent to Rashid Ali, who had started a revolt in Iraq. This revolt,

as has already been mentioned, proved a failure and enabled the Allies to take the necessary measures in time to stem the Axis tide in Syria. In June 1941 Free French troops supported by British Commonwealth Forces entered Syria and the Lebanon and in five weeks the campaign ended successfully for the Allies. The justification for armed intervention in Syria was thus announced by General Catroux, the Free French Delegate-General in Syria, in his proclamation made on the eve of the Allied entry:

“France declares you independent by the voice of her sons. Free French and British forces cross your frontiers not to take away your liberty but to ensure it and to free Syria from the forces of Hitler.”

In September, Sheikh Taj-ed-Din al Hussain was proclaimed first President of the Syrian Republic in pursuance of the Free French and British policy. For the duration of the war, the defence of the country and war production is to remain in the Allied hands. The British Government recognised the independence of Syria and Sir Edward Spears was appointed as His Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary to the Republics of Syria and Lebanon.



## LEBANON

Population—8,85,000.

Capital—Beirut. Population—1,60,000.

The Republic of Lebanon is the smaller sister of the Republic of Syria and like the latter, came under French mandate after the conference of San Remo in 1920. It is a strip of land, about 120 miles in length and varying in width from 30 to 35 miles along the Mediterranean sea coast. It extends from the Palestine frontier in the south to a point about 15 miles north of Tripoli in the north; its western boundary runs down the anti-Lebanon range and then down the Great Central depression. Lebanon with its extensive coastline is of far greater importance to France than Syria, with its long, badly protected frontiers and vast stretches of desert land.

As in the case of Syria, the treaty with France signed in 1936, promised independence to Lebanon. As the population is mainly Christian, the relations

with the paramount power have not been so strained as in the case of Syria.

When the Allied armies entered Lebanon and forced the Vichy forces to capitulate, Lebanon too, like Syria was proclaimed an independent sovereign state by General Catroux. As in the case of the neighbouring Republic of Syria, for the duration of the war, the defence of the country will be undertaken by the Allies and the Lebanese national forces. Alfred Nakkache is the first President of the new Republic.

Syria and Lebanon, this ancient Bible land, geographically and geologically inseparable from Palestine, possesses more than the normal muddle of people and sects. There are Arabs, Turkomans, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Kurds and now the Free French and followers of the men of Vichy. This region has a history as varied and interesting as any in the world. Damascus is a name of old romance, associated not only with Caliphs, but also with the Syrian emperors of Biblical times and their general Naaman who came to Elisha the Jewish prophet, to be miraculously cured of his leprosy. Here also St. Paul was converted to Christianity. Tyre and Sidon on the coast of Leba-

non were centres of the great Phoenician Trading Empire and the chief naval ports of the Persian Empire. Antioch was the third city of the Roman Empire and the capital from which Vespasian and his line became rulers of the Roman world. Founded by Antiochus, the general of Alexander, this place is the very heart of that synthesis of East and West which is the characteristic of the Levant throughout history. Aleppo, Homs and Hama are names well known in the story of the Caliphs and the Crusades. Not least interesting is the desert city of Palmyra where the famous queen Zenobia held her romantic court in 267 A. D. Up till a few years ago, the great pillars of the city towering over the tents of the Arab nomads, pitched about their bases, were the wonder of the few travellers hardy and bold enough to venture to explore this remote scene of former splendour. To-day Palmyra is a small but flourishing town with an important aerodrome on the desert route.

## TURKEY

Population—1,78,70,000 including European Turkey.  
Capital—Ankara. Population—1,35,000.

For the purposes of this pamphlet, we are interested only in Turkey in Asia. Turkey in Europe is a small country consisting of Eastern Thrace including the cities of Istanbul (Constantinople) and Edirne (Adrianapole) and is separated from Asia by the Bosphorus at Constantinople and by the Dardanelles. European Turkey's political neighbours are Greece and Bulgaria, both now under Nazi control.

Turkey in Asia comprises the whole of Asia Minor—also known as Anatolia and extends from the Aegean Sea to the Western boundaries of Soviet Russia and Iran and from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, and the northern boundaries of Syria and Iraq. Geographically Turkey in Asia falls into three divisions. First, the rich coastal belt in the Mediterranean, secondly, the high barren

plateau of Anatolia, and finally the heights of Armenia in the South East. This place is famous in legend. Here stood Troy, the scene of the exploits of Hector and Achilles. Here were the famous Greek cities of ancient times, Ephesus, Miletus, Smyrna and a host of others. Here too was the kingdom of Lydia, whose richness is still remembered when we speak of its most famous king Croesus. Here Julius Caesar fought his first battle and distinguished himself by killing the enemy general. Here too Caesar was captured by pirates. Xenophon, the famous Greek historian crossed the Anatolian heights from Troy to the Black Sea with 10,000 Greek soldiers in the Persian army, and opened the way that Alexander followed to the East. Here Mithridates, King of Pontus, reigned and fought with Pompey the great Roman general. Here too, in Armenia, was fought the great war of Nero's reign. This was the heart of the Eastern Roman Empire ruled by Constantine and his successors, an Empire which stood when Rome fell, and survived till the Ottoman Turks finally overthrew Constantinople in 1453 A. D. The Turks as invaders succeeded to the rule of a mixed population in which Greeks and Armenians predominated.

The Turks made Anatolia their chief home and busied themselves with affairs of administration and soldiery, leaving trade to the Greeks and Armenians and foreign merchants, principally Venetian and later, English. Turkey became the centre of an empire of great magnificence and power. Its borders stretched from India to Spain. The vast treasure of Malwa, plundered from the sack of Mandu, found its way through Turkish mercenaries to the coffers of Sulaiman the Magnificent, whose armies conquered Hungary and shook the gates of Vienna.

In the centuries between its birth and collapse (1299-1918) the Ottoman Empire had earned great wealth and glory, as well as, fear and hatred. During the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries the Ottoman Empire was one of the strongest powers in the world, extending from the Caspian Sea to the Adriatic and Hungary and from the Indian Ocean to Morocco and the Sudan. It comprised Asia Minor, part of Russia, the Ukraine, the Crimea, the Balkan States and the whole of Arabia. The Black Sea, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Aegean were dominated by Turkish ships and the Ottoman dominions included not only the Byzantine Empire, but the greater part of the whole Ro-

man Empire. But long before 1918 the Empire had begun to sicken of corruption and decadence and stagnation. Repeated attacks since the 18th century had steadily chipped off pieces from its territory. During the last Great War, Iraq, Syria and Arabia passed into other hands. In 1920 the invading Greeks set out to demolish even the remnants that the Allies had left. They were beaten in 1922 by the Turkish Nationalists under Kemal Pasha.

To speak of modern Turkey is really to speak of Kemal Pasha, or Kemal Ataturk, as he called himself later. To understand Kemalism one must try to remember the state of Turkey before Kemal came to power. Most of Turkey's natural resources and economic assets were in the hands of foreigners who had obtained concessions. The corruption of the administration was equalled by the prevalent lack of organisation. Justice, general education and hygiene were conspicuous for their absence. Kemal Pasha therefore had to work with most unpromising materials. He had to fashion the destiny of a country of 13 million people, who were soaked in customs and superstition, and 90 per cent of whom were illiterate. For Kemal, it became a

matter of life and death, to put Turkey's past behind her and to put her in the front rank of Western powers. He worked incessantly towards this goal. He drove out the Sultan and abolished the Caliphate. Islam is no longer the State religion of the Republic. The fez was abolished and with it disappeared the veil and harem. The Latin alphabet replaced Turkish characters and education to-day is compulsory, free and secular. Kemal moved the capital out of corrupt and cosmopolitan Constantinople, and built the new capital at Ankara. He also built factories, dams, schools, and railroads. One example of the thoroughness with which he set out to make Turkey a great nation, was the exchange of Turkish and Greek nationals, after the war with Greece in 1922. Never before in history had there been an exchange of population of two countries on so vast a scale. In 1914 Turkey had 20,000,000 inhabitants of whom 11,500,000 were Turks.

Kemal Ataturk's was a busy, hectic life. He died in 1938 mourned by the whole Turkish nation. Kemal Ataturk was succeeded by President Ineunu.

President Ineunu and his Prime Minister Sarajoglu face critical days ahead. Their state is



too young to face again the ravages of a modern war, but so far Turkish statesmen have observed strict neutrality in spite of being surrounded by dangers on all sides. Russia and Germany are locked in deadly battle for the prize of Caucasus on Turkey's borders. Germany controls all the islands on her Aegean coast line, and Crete in the Mediterranean is in Nazi hands. The situation is fraught with mortal danger, but Turkish statesmen have repeatedly affirmed that their country will remain neutral, for they do not want war. But if attacked, "Turkey will fight to death."

## SAUDI ARABIA

Population—65,00,000.

Capital—Riyadh. Population—30,000.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, so named since 1932, is a personal union of two countries, the Sultan of Nejd being also king of the Hejaz. By the Treaty of Jedda, 1927, Great Britain recognised Ibn Saud as an independent ruler, King of Hejaz and of Nejd. Nejd ("Plateau") has no definite frontiers but includes the Nafud and Delma deserts and reaches eastward to the Persian gulf. The Hejaz extends from Asir in the south to Transjordan in the north and from the Red Sea to the ill-defined boundaries of Central Arabia. There is a very general but erroneous impression that all Arabia is sandy desert. Most of its central plateau is hard, dry steppe land covered with a coarse vegetation adequate to feed the camels and horses of nomadic tribes. The interior of Arabia is dotted with oases whose fertile lands support perhaps

a million people in sixty or seventy settlements.

The inhabitants of the Hejaz are predominantly Wahabis, the most conservative and puritanical of Mohammedan sects. The Wahabi creed was founded by one Abdul Wahab in 1703; he was one of the sternest reformers of Islam. The Wahabis are noted for their puritanism and uncompromising attitude to all non-Wahabi Muslims. Besides the Quran, the only other book accepted by them as authoritative is the Sunnat, the life of Mohammed. Nothing is permitted to the Wahabis which is not sanctioned either in the Quran or the Sunnat. Some of the main tenets of their creed are: "Bow thy head to no one but Allah. Do not kiss the hand of either the king, thy imam or sheikh. Wear no silk." Therefore, no stone, no picture, no dome above a grave, nor even the grave of a saint can be venerated as being holy. The arts, music and silken clothes are forbidden. Even their mosques are noted for their simplicity; they consist of just a floor of stone or even mud and a few straw mats. Nothing that enlivens the spirit or that pleases the appetite is allowed.

The history of Saudi Arabia is a record of the work of its ruler, Ibn Saud. He began his political

and military life at the age of twenty-two and within thirty years created the Arabian Empire.

Few countries in the world are poorer than Saudi Arabia—and larger. Its area is approximately 10,00,000 square miles. Compare that with the area of Great Britain which is 89,000, of France which is 2,10,000, and of Germany which is 1,80,000 square miles and yet the population of the whole country is less than that of London! There is no agriculture worth speaking of. Some fruits, notably peaches and grapes, could be exported, if fruit growing and transport could be organised on modern lines. Till recently camels were the only means of transport. Now Ibn Saud uses motor cars.

The main source of income for Ibn Saud's kingdom are the holy places, Jeddah, Mecca and Medina. Mecca was a great focus of trade routes even in pre-Islamic days. To this ancient mart, therefore, Mohammed came, with his vision of the unity of God and here it took shape to be carried to the ends of the world by his ardent followers. The sanctuary of Mecca received a new prestige from the victory of Islam. Kaaba became the holiest site in Mecca, and the pilgrimage or "haj,"

the most sacred ritual of Mohammedanism, drawing worshippers from all over the world. During the 12th month of the Moslem year (Zil Hij) more than 50,000 pilgrims flock to holy Mecca. But pilgrims, though permanent, are by no means a stable source of income. An Indian monetary crisis, or a slump in the price of Ceylon tea or Malayan tin or a world war affects their number. Now that whole countries of the Far East are under Japanese domination, the income of Ibn Saud has considerably gone down.

One of the greatest achievements of Ibn Saud has been to bring an element of stability in the life of the Wahabi. The Wahabi was once a nomad who lived by raiding other people's cattle or by murdering the members of other tribes. Ibn Saud, therefore, gave the Wahabis stability by settling them on land, giving them homes. The new colonies called 'Hijar' are situated round wells or along rivers. The colonisation of the Wahabi is a revolutionary measure of the greatest importance. The Wahabis are men of hot blood used to emphasising their arguments with a dagger; they have known only one law—the law of the desert. That is now being replaced by the Islamic Canon Law. History plays strange tricks upon humanity. The

inhabitants of the West are to-day becoming more and more nomadic, just when the oldest nomadic race in the world is beginning to settle down to a more organised home life !

To-day, there is some justice and security in Saudi Arabia, thanks to the efforts of its ruler. Ibn Saud's justice is legendary all over the Arab world.

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### YEMEN

Population—35,00,000.

Capital—Sanaa. Population—40,000.

This country, 'Arabia Felix' of the ancients, occupies the south west corner of Arabia between the Aden protectorate and Asir. Till recently little was known about Yemen. There were numerous legends but no history. But to-day it is becoming increasingly known that its past level of civilisation was as high as the present is low. The land is much richer than Saudi Arabia and grows wheat, barley, millet, oats, and coffee. The Yemen coffee is among the best in the world, particularly the one grown at Mocha.

Its present ruler, Imam Yahya, took over the government of the country after the Turks had withdrawn from the Arabian peninsula. Early in his career, he was responsible for encroachments on the Aden protectorate and military action had to be taken against him. In 1934 a Treaty was

signed with Britain by which he was recognised King of Yemen. Imam Yahya and all the more important inhabitants of Yemen belong to the sect of the Zaidites which is probably the most fanatical of Muslim sects. Yemen is perhaps the most backward of all the big Arab States, and is one of the chief obstacles to a lasting pacification of the Near East. The following quotation from the book "Arabian Peak and Desert" by Ameen Rihami bears this out: "The people are like the brutes, ever ready to leap. They are always fighting against each other—it is in their nature."



## IRAN

Population—1,50,00,000.

Capital—Teheran. Population—5,30,000.

Iran is the modern name of Persia. It is bounded on the north by the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, on the West by Iraq, on the south by the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, with Afghanistan and Baluchistan on the East. The word 'Iran' means land of Aryans, and unlike most other Middle Easterners, the indigenous Iranians are not Semites but Aryans, and Persian is an Aryan tongue.

Persia first came into history as the home of Cyrus and Zoroaster. The first, a great soldier and conqueror led out his hardy mountain countrymen, to conquer the middle East and lay the foundations of the Persian Empire that stretched from Egypt and the Bosphorus to the frontier of India. Zoroaster was the greatest religious reformer of his time, and gave to Persia that religion which the Parsis of India still keep alive. The

Empire fell to Alexander and the religion much later was supplanted by Islam, but Persia still remained a country of beautiful, if barren mountains, and high attainments in art and literature. The town of Shiraz is known all over the East for its roses and wine and Nishapur as the birth-place of the immortal Omar Khayyam. The natural beauty of certain parts of Iran, comes up repeatedly in Persian literature, and even the modern Iranian quotes with intense pride the following Persian saying: "Ispahan nisf jahan agar Tabrez na bashad," which means that if there was no Tabrez, then the beauty of Ispahan would be equal to half the world. (Tabrez is an Iranian town in the north and Ispahan in the south).

Iran is the western gateway by which many invaders in the past came to India. Nadir Shah and Tamerlane were among those who came through Iran, and during the last war, one of Kaiser's scheme was to use the Turkish army for an assault on India through Iran. But,

'The best laid schemes o'mice and men

Gang aft a-gley.'

Sultan Ahmed Shah Kajar, King of Persia, was deposed by the Persian National Assembly in

1925 and Raza Shah Pahlevi was made King. As often happens in the near East, Raza Pahlevi was an obscure military man who rose to power by personal force. He was Prime Minister under Sultan Ahmad Shah whom he succeeded, and it was mainly due to Raza Shah's driving force and energy, that the authority of a central government was re-established over almost the whole country. The greatest personal and political influence in the life of Raza Shah was Kemal Ataturk. Many of the reforms introduced in Iran were copied from Turkey. One of his first moves was to establish public order by reorganising the army and crushing the brigands and rebellious tribal chieftains. Raza Shah gave the country new roads, new ports and new harbours. He built more schools and introduced co-education in Iran. One of his greatest projects was the Trans-Iranian Railway—the first to be built in Iran—which runs from Bandar Shah on the Caspian Sea to Bandar Shahpur on the Persian gulf and passes through Tehran, Qum and Ahwaz. This railway has great strategic, political and commercial importance.

Because Iran lies between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, it has always been to the

interest of Russia and of India and so England, that Iran should not fall under the control of a power which is likely to threaten the vital interests of either Russia or England.

Moreover, Iran is the third oil-producing country in the world. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Co., produces and markets 60 million barrels of oil a year, and the great refining plant at Abadan is probably the biggest in the world. The royalty received by the Persian Government—calculated at a specific rate per ton of oil—is £ 40,00,000 being 10 per cent of total Iranian revenue. And not far away are the oil fields of the Caucasus.

These facts give an indication of the strategic importance of Iran. Though Raza Shah Pahlevi did much for modern Iran, he made no pretence of being anything but a despot. And as did many despots in the past, he ruled the country with an iron hand and what was worse he fell under the spell of the German military machine. The nucleus of a dangerous fifth column began to grow in Iran and among those who were plotting mischief were the Germans, Dr. Grobba, Baron Von Oppenheim, and Rudolf Roser; their accomplices were two characters we have come across more than once in the Middle

East, Rashid Ali Gilani and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. A large number of German 'tourists' and 'technicians' had also found their way into the country.

Not only was Iran in danger, but British and Russian interests were also seriously threatened. Requests to Raza Shah Pahlevi to get rid of German agents went unheeded, as he had definitely turned pro-Axis, and, therefore, joint Russo-British action was taken on the 25th August 1941 and the country was soon occupied. Both the Russian and the British Governments made it perfectly clear in their proclamations that such a step was necessitated because of German infiltration into Iran, which was a source of infinite danger not only to the Allied cause, but to Iran itself; certain strategic positions alone would be occupied and that also for the duration of the war. There was little opposition to either the Russian or British armies, for the despotic rule of Raza Shah had made him lose the confidence of his people. Particularly was this true of Raza Shah's later years, for Iran had been practically denuded of wheat, large stocks of which had been sent to Germany and there was a state of famine in Iran.

The first aim of the Allies in occupying Iran was to deny the country to German influence—about 3,000 German agents in Iran were later handed over to the Allies and are prisoners. The second aim was to provide protection to its oil fields and the oil fields of Iraq, and, thirdly to develop Iran as an avenue for the supply of war material and other essential goods to Russia. The advance of German armies towards the Caucasus once again brought this question of Allied action in Iran to the forefront.

## EPILOGUE

We have completed our journey in the Middle East; the last country to be visited being the home of the great warrior Rustum, the poet Sheikh Sadi and the epicurean philosopher Omar Khayyam. The journey has been rather fast, but none the less interesting. The impressions gained have been many, but two stand out for their importance, one an immediate objective, the other more distant.

Let us deal with the most immediate first, for it is fleeting and will pass.

*Axis Campaign in the Middle East*—While one of Hitler's armies was battering its way to Stalingrad another army had reached within 60 miles of Alexandria. The Nazi armies in Egypt have since ceased to exist, but if this gigantic pincer movement had been successful the prongs would have met in the Suez Canal or the Persian Gulf. Why did Hitler strike at Egypt? He had three or perhaps four excellent reasons for a Middle Eastern campaign. The most immediate was his need for oil.

However large the German reserves and the synthetic production might be, these and Rumania's oil wells could not long supply the needs of all Europe's factories, as well as the huge oil consumption of Nazi tanks and trucks and planes. Though the fields of the Middle East produce only about 6 per cent of the world's supply, that would have gone a long way to keep Hitler's war machine and war industry fuelled and lubricated indefinitely. And a victory in the Middle East would also fulfil the old *Drang Nach Osten* dream of Germany. She could then successfully invade India. What Napoleon failed to achieve, what the Kaiser could not encompass, would have been achieved by the great Fuehrer, the "Greatest German." For has it not been said of him, the unspeakable: "The leader of the German people is one of those great men whom the Lord has entrusted with mighty tasks on behalf of his people and the world." ? If Hitler won, then he would be not only great, but the greatest German of all.

*Pan-Arabism*—After this war has ended, what will the Middle East do? In common with the rest of the world, it will have to face new problems and seek new solutions. We started this book



with the assertion that the Middle East is a world in itself, that it is an historical, climatic and geographical unity. Will religious, political and economic barriers tend to break down in the post-war Middle East, or will new found freedoms only accentuate differences?

Many of the Middle East rulers have seen visions of a Pan-Arabia, extending from Persia to the Mediterranean, and some of them passionately desire to see these dreams become a reality. There is a common denominator, in that much of this region contains peoples who are historically Semitic in origin, who speak varying dialects of Arabic and whose predominant religion is Islam. The pact of Saadabad signed in 1938 has linked Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey together to fight aggression. A small beginning has been made and it is not difficult to imagine the gradual evolution of a Pan-Arabic state round this nucleus. It is, however, to be remembered that Arab sentiment, where it is conscious at all of the need for union, favours Pan-Arab rather than Pan-Islamic union, and Arab politicians until they obtained their present independence in small units, were on the whole strongly anti-Turk and actively opposed to

Pan-Islamic movement. The celebrated writer, John Gunther feels that Pan-Arabism is a myth. The world moves fast in this twentieth century, and the myths of yesterday might become the truths of to-morrow. At the same time it is idle to ignore the fact that differences between Arab states are too big. Culturally, Pan-Arabism is possible, but politically, it is still a distant dream.



